

## CURRENT ISSUES.

WHEN a classical scholar, who is more than a scholar, interprets ancient life, the result is generally a good book. It breathes wisdom as well as knowledge, and that is the mark of vitality in literature. Such a book is *The Greek Point of View*. It is written by an Oxford scholar, who is now Principal of University College, Toronto. Mr. Maurice Hutton has ideas of his own; he touches a wide range of topics; and among them the virtue of humility.

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Or, is it a virtue? It was not, for a man like Nietzsche, who denounced it as a Christian aberration. But then Nietzsche glorified the qualities he lacked. This thinker, as Mr. Hutton says, "who was himself a shy and timid and deaf recluse, never shedding a drop of blood except when he shaved," canonized the opposite virtues of the assertive, pugnacious man, and misread the ethical problem. Humility is a virtue. But, Mr. Hutton admits, it was unknown to the Greeks.

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They had indeed a quality which went by the untranslatable name of *σωφροσύνη* or *εὐβουλία*, but it was purely intellectual. It meant a proper perception of one's place in the great universe. It implied that a poor mortal like man should be too sensible to boast or swagger, "that such a creature should never boast, or should at least 'touch wood' after boasting, and throw salt over his shoulder, and perform religiously other antics, to propitiate the evil eye of the mighty unseen and jealous makers of the alien law." Such was Greek humility.

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This is not to be taken without certain qualifications. Later on, Mr. Hutton himself allows that Socrates was both humble and conscious of authority. But on the whole, the verdict is true. What the Greeks considered humility was "a form of

intelligence, a confession of facts, of the actual nothingness of man before Nature."

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And Christian humility? Mr. Hutton at once describes it as beyond the horizon of his Greeks. He takes St. Paul as a representative. The apostle was humble, but not as a Greek was. "He tells us at first whilst he is still a novice in the faith of Christ, that he is the least of all the Apostles and not worthy of being called an Apostle." This, by the way, is an exaggeration. When the Apostle wrote First Corinthians, he was far from being a novice in the faith. However, let that pass. Mr. Hutton proceeds: "At a later date, when his knowledge of Christ has progressed, that he is the least of all 'saints' or Church members; and last of all, when he is finishing his good fight and keeping the faith, that he is the chief of sinners."

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What does this mean? That humility for a Christian like St. Paul was on a new basis. "Clearly it was his moral aspiration and his purified will that prompted this rising scale of self-abasement, and not a nice perception of his own claims as measured by the claims of his neighbours."

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"Some say, Jeremiah," the disciples answered, when Jesus asked them what people thought He was. Perhaps they spoke better than they knew, says Mr. A. D. Martin in the July number of the *Congregational Quarterly*. He is dealing with the objections taken to the doctrine of everlasting punishment, a doctrine which in many quarters is regarded as a blot on Christianity. Yet apparently it was held by Jesus. Mr. Martin suggests that our Lord perhaps uttered and held it in the context of Jeremiah.

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The belief that God could change His mind and relent, was firmly held by a prophet like Jeremiah. His famous parable of the potter is an illustration. "If a nation turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them," says the Lord through the prophet. That is, even an unequivocal sentence of doom may be reversed by God. Jeremiah asserts the divine sovereignty, and yet he qualifies or supplements it. As Dr. Skinner puts it, "God wills the perfection of His creatures; and though there is that in human nature which

resists and retards the accomplishment of His purpose, and may seem to frustrate a long course of patient discipline, the Almighty Worker does not forsake the work of His hands, but labours persistently, unceasingly, and in the end effectually, for the reconciliation of all things to Himself." Such is Jeremiah's faith. Or, as Sir George Adam Smith puts it, "the Divine Sovereignty is a real Sovereignty and therefore includes Freedom. It is not fettered by its own previous decrees. . . . There is a Divine as well as a human Freewill."

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Now, Mr. Martin asks, as all the best elements of Jeremiah's mind reappear in Jesus, "may we not include therein his principle of the Divine Repentance? Is not that the accompanying assumption and true context of all our Lord's language of doom?" That is, did not Jesus assume that the threats and warnings of eternal doom were contingent?

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There are two objections that will at once occur to the reader. One is, that Jeremiah's doctrine of the relativity or contingency of punishment refers only to the dealings of God with men and nations in this life. The other is, that the same principle would need to cover the promises of bliss to the righteous and obedient. Are they contingent too?

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Mr. Martin frankly faces both difficulties; he does not consider them fatal to his theory. But they haunt the mind, even when it is prepared to see more in Mr. Martin's theory than a fanciful speculation. Probably many will not feel even the need of such relief as he proposes to afford them. It may be only a curious coincidence, but at this very moment the great United Church of Canada has started with a credal basis which affirms the very doctrine in question. The nineteenth article runs thus: "We believe that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust, through the power of the Son of God, who shall come to judge the living and the dead; that the finally impenitent shall go away into eternal punishment and the righteous into life eternal." This represents Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational faith in Canada; so that evidently the pressure of the difficulty is not acutely felt in some quarters, at least not to the extent described by Mr. Martin.